DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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3.

STABILITY OF SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia has been one of our most stable friends. Saudi society has demonstrated a high degree of adaptability while undergoing rapid economic and social change. The Saudi leadership remains in close contact with its people and has sought to carry forward national development while maintaining and strengthening its commitment to the Islamic values of the society.

-- There has been some dissatisfaction among the small Shi'a religious minority, but the Saudi Government has effectively responded to this group and reduced tensions. Demonstrations reflecting religious tensions in 1979 were not repeated in 1980.

-- We view the seizure of the Mecca Mosque as an aberation which does not affect our fundamental judgments regarding the prospects for stability in Saudi Arabia. The attack on the Mosque by a small group of religious fanatics was abhorrent to all Saudis.

-- In the years ahead, Saudi Arabia is likely to be faced with continuing internal pressures to assure various elements of society a fair share and a meaningful role. Having made progress in evolving government institutions, Saudi Arabia faces the challenge of maintaining sensitive contact with its people and of developing institutions which will carry its traditional social harmony over into the modern era.

-- Our sale of military equipment to Saudi Arabia is intended to counter external threats. At the same time, an improved defensive capability will enhance Saudi confidence

and ability to deal effectively with external pressures that work against internal stability. A refusal, however, by the United States to help Saudi Arabia meet its legitimate defense needs would build popular dissatisfaction with close U.S.-Saudi ties.